

Dosoftei, the *Lives of the Saints*, and the Defense of Ancestral Religious Practices in Transylvania

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Metropolitan Dosoftei seems to have felt the need to “reactualize” faith, bringing the old time of the saints’ passions into what was the new law of Christ of Moldavia’s historical present.

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THE EFFORT of investigating the culture and mentality of centuries long past has its own peculiar charm. However, just like an attempt to understand ancient Greek philosophy that someone belonging to a different culture may undertake through their own “axiological lenses,” “distorting”¹ thus, to some extent, what is specific to the intellectual life belonging to that culture, identifying the particular way in which the spirit of the culture of yore developed and understanding its characteristic system of coordinates may similarly encounter—quite naturally, as it were—various obstacles. This might be due, firstly, to the difficulty with which someone belonging to a different era can detach oneself from their own worldview and concepts in order to enter a world that is far removed from their scientific and philosophical vocabulary.² On the other hand, although bound to produce merely tentative knowledge and incomplete recreations,³ an investigation of this type may contribute to the understanding of cultural personal-

ities, of the mentality of an epoch: when entering such a “cultural dialogue,”⁴ a historian or a philologist will have access not only to a world of physical objects, but also to a symbolic universe. The object of research sends messages addressed in a *language* that is peculiar to them, a language that is nothing but the materialization of the spirit of a bygone age,⁵ which researchers have a duty to observe with their “mind’s eye,”⁶ because, in this way, they become capable of understanding a people or an era.

MOLDAVIA’S RELIGIOUS life and literature during the second half of the seventeenth century were dominated by the figure of the “most humble” Dosoftei, the Metropolitan of Moldavia, whose complex personality and rich scholarly activity have generated, throughout time, a substantial religious, historical and philological interest, Romanian historiography seeking to fully exploit his cultural legacy. Dosoftei (1624–1693) entered the memory of later generations through Ion Neculce’s portrayal of him. In a very brief biographical remark on Neculce’s portrait, we should note that the ethnic origin of Dosoftei, whose lay name was Dimitrie, has been much debated.⁷ Ștefan Ciobanu⁸ initially deemed his origins to have been Ukrainian, but later revised his opinion, claiming that Dosoftei was of Aromanian descent.⁹ Another opinion that has been put forth is that he came from a family of Macedonian Romanians;¹⁰ more recently, based on the language of his books, conclusions have been drawn that the hierarch Dosoftei was a “son of the Moldavian land,”¹¹ having been born in Moldavia, most likely in Suceava.¹² Dosoftei apparently began his studies in Iași and continued them, after the fashion of the time, in Lviv,¹³ where he learned classical languages, Slavonic, Greek, Polish, and Ukrainian, becoming one of the polyglots of his time.¹⁴ Back in his country, he took the habit at the monastery of Probota, quickly climbing the rungs of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, so much so that in 1658 he appeared in the documents of the time as Bishop of Huși, later as Bishop of Roman (between the years 1659 to 1671), while in 1671 he became, under the reign of George Duca, “Archbishop and Metropolitan of Suceava and the Whole of Moldavia.”

Shortly after his admission to the monastic order, Dosoftei began his scholarly work.¹⁵ Compelling evidence¹⁶ has been brought that, around the year 1650, he produced the first translation into Romanian of Herodotus’ *Histories*, which appears to have been not only his first translation, but also one of the earliest known European translations.¹⁷ This work is prefaced by 26 lines entitled “Stihuri predosloviei,” which foreshadow the later *Psaltirea în versuri* (Verse Psalter), and concludes with 29 moral-religious and political teachings by the Byzantine Emperor Basil the Macedonian. The series of translations continues with a *Pateric grecesc* (Greek Patericon), with Agapios Landos’ book *Mântuirea păcătoșilor* (The

salvation of sinners), and with fragments from *Viața și minunile Sf. Vasile cel Nou*¹⁸ (The life and miracles of St. Basil the New). While in exile¹⁹ in Poland (1686–1694), he continued his poetic endeavors. Longing for his country, he completed²⁰ a new version of the *Poem* about the princes of Moldavia, in which he extended their list to include Constantin Cantemir and refuted Simion Dascălu's theory whereby the Romanians were the descendants of "Roman criminals." He then translated, from Neo-Greek into Romanian, the famous *Chronograph* of Matthew Kigalas, followed by a few verses from the Moldavian coat of arms and by others that represented the introduction (prologue) to Cretan writer Georgios Hortatzis's drama *Erophile*;²¹ this was also the time when he started translating John Damascene's *Dogmatic* works into Romanian.

In parallel with his activity as a translator, he also got involved in the theological dispute raging within the Russian Orthodox Church. Metropolitan Yasinski of Kiev and Patriarch Joachim of Moscow urged him to translate from Greek into Slavonic-Russian several dogmatic and liturgical works written by some Holy Fathers and ecclesiastical writers,²² such as *Against Heresies* by Simon, Archbishop of Thessalonica, the *Epistles* of Ignatius Theophorus, St. John Chrysostom's *Sermons* and the *History of the Church* written by Patriarch Jeremias of Constantinople.²³

Eventually, however, Metropolitan Dosoftei—as Bishop of the Romanian Church in Moldavia—put his entire life in the service of his country's cultural interests.²⁴ He tried to restore the printing press of Vasile Lupu, but the typographic material brought from the monastery of Uniew, where he had printed the Psalter, was insufficient to bring back into operation a ruined printing press, so he called upon Patriarch Joachim of Moscow for help. His request was not left unanswered. The patriarch sent him a new printing press,²⁵ so that he would be able to fulfill his desire of having the divine service books printed.

Although in the absence of an explanation of their historical background, any overview of the scholarly activities undertaken by Dosoftei may compromise, to some extent, the comprehension of the real effort that the bishop undertook in the service of the Romanian culture, we consider that even the mere listing of the works printed under his direct guidance may help shape the profile of the Moldavian hierarch. As already mentioned, the first texts we owe to the erudite scholar of the seventeenth century were printed in Uniew (Ukraine) in 1673: the *Verse Psalter* and the *Akathist to the Mother of God*. Metropolitan Dosoftei's name is also related to other religious books printed in Iași: *Dumnezeiasca Liturghie* (The Holy Liturgy, 1679), with its full text in Romanian, *Psaltirea slavo-română* (The Slavic-Romanian Psalter, 1680), *Molitvănicul de înțâles* (The Prayer Book explained, 1681), *Viața și petreacerea svinților* (Lives of the saints, 1682–1686), *Octoiubul* (The Octoechos, 1683?), and *Parimiile* (The Paroemia, 1683).²⁶

It has been more than three hundred years since the publication of Dosoftei's works. Accepting that, in a hermeneutic and semiotic-cultural research, the reality of an object is, above all, symbolic rather than physical, we understand that such a reality never ceases to demand interpretation and reinterpretation; the act of recollecting the—sometimes forgotten—meaning of a book is accomplished via the recourse to memory, which is also symbolic. Furthermore, the imagination becomes a necessary element of authentic memory, because memory is no longer considered a mere revival of the past, but a creative and constructive process.²⁷ The world of physical objects, books especially, may be partially salvaged from vulnerability and oblivion through continuous remembrance.

Together with the cross, the icon, and the temple, which are seen in the Middle Ages in their symbolic dimension of partaking of the heavenly through their very material configuration,²⁸ the book is also a carrier of the divine word. This is not an ordinary book, but the holy book, the religious book that expresses a hierophany. Thus, there is an “ontological communion”²⁹ between the sacred and its material support, whether it is a matter of the sacraments, such as books, icons, crosses, or of the human being. The books of this time deeply permeated man's life, and in the light of their own time, such books could take on an ambivalent shade. On the one hand, they could be a reification of the divine word and, therefore, of the deity; on the other hand, they were an instrument of the ritual and exercise of piety, directly related to experiencing the religious feeling.³⁰

Moreover, in order that these holy books might become accessible to the widest possible audience, Dosoftei, the Metropolitan of Moldavia, took the initiative of interpreting “into the Romanian language” the religious books found in churches, printing, in 1679, *The Holy Liturgy* and stating the primacy of his own printing among the others of its kind. He asked for help, in this regard, from the Patriarch Joachim of Moscow, from whom he requested a printing press. However, the introduction of the Romanian language in church served more than strictly religious needs, reflecting the Romanian scholars' desire to enlist the vernacular in the process of awakening the national consciousness, by positing the Romanian language as a language of culture.

The consequences of Dosoftei's cultural gesture are overwhelming; some theologians consider that this was the moment when the Romanian Church fulfilled its purpose as a church of the Oriental rite,³¹ even though, at that time, the gesture of nationalizing the divine service must have seemed daring to some, given that all the Christian churches still officiated in a “holier” language. Nonetheless, the Moldavian Metropolitan cautioned his potential opponents, showing to them, in the prefaces of his books, that a language that was unfamiliar to its readers prevented the content of holy books from reaching their minds and souls; furthermore, he openly admitted that he had simply followed the words

of the Apostle Paul, who demanded that the Christian truth be revealed. Moreover, as he noted in the *Lives of the Saints*, the Holy Fathers helped people arrive at the true faith; similarly, Metropolitan Dosoftei strove tirelessly, throughout his entire life, to render the word of God as closely as possible to the understanding of the “rabble” (= ordinary people), using for that purpose the spoken Romanian language, “taken from the very mouth of the people.”³² Since Dosoftei, the author, writes for a reader who is permanently present in the texture of the book, it was natural that the communication instrument between narrator and reader should be the very language of that reader. The repercussions of transposing religious service texts into vernacular language are unparalleled, representing essentially a purely “humanist”³³ gesture, which, by elevating the language to the status of a “cultural vehicle,” already foreshadows a “new culture,”³⁴ based on asserting the originality, specificity, and personality of both an individual and an entire people.

THE FIRST high hagiographic text of considerable length (1,000 pages) in Romanian culture, written in Romanian with Cyrillic script, belongs to Metropolitan Dosoftei and was printed in Iași between 1682 and 1684, in four volumes; it was unfortunately unfinished because of the unfavorable historical conditions which forced Dosoftei into exile. This text bears the title *Viața și petreacerea svinților*³⁵ (Lives of the saints) or, as noted by the author himself, *Proloagele*³⁶ *tuturor svinților* (Prologues of all the saints).

Dosoftei’s *Prologues* are usually called *Lives of the Saints*, using only one of the titles the author set on their first page. According to the “Word to the Reader,” the translation was made from ancient Greek and Neo-Greek (“grecește” and “ellinește”) into Romanian (“rumânește pre limbă prostă”) with great toil (“cu lungă nevoie și cu lexicone de agiuns”),³⁷ an effort that lasted twenty-four years, namely, from 1658, when the rule of George Ghica started, until the time of Anthony Ruset and George Duca.³⁸

The *Lives of the Saints* printed by the high prelate of Moldavia reflects the Greek versions of the *Synaxaria*, to which the erudite metropolitan added information taken from the South Slavic versions, from previous Romanian translations (from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries), and even perhaps from a Moscow edition he had known at least since his trip to Kiev in 1684.³⁹ Nonetheless, the principal source of the text printed in Iași seems to have been a Neo-Greek reworking of the Byzantine *Menaia*, compiled and printed by Maximos, Bishop of Cythera (1549–1602), to which would be added Symeon Metaphrastes’ Byzantine original (of the tenth century), edited in Glykys’ Greek printing press of Venice, and historical details from the hagiographical legends incorporated in the Byzantine chronographs of Dorotheus of Monemvasia and Matthew Kigalas, from the seventeenth century. The bibliographical list Dosoftei consulted

also comprised the Medio-Bulgarian texts that were in circulation in the Romanian churches of that time and the legends of the Romanian saints.⁴⁰

What might have impelled Dosoftei to write and print the *Lives of the Saints*?

One answer might reside in his desire to show that the gift of holiness also encompassed the Romanian people. Another possible explanation for the translation of this hagiographic text into Romanian might be related to the fulfillment of some needs pertaining to religious practice: at the altar, the sermon could consist of a reading of the life of the saint corresponding to that day. Dosoftei gave thus a book that completed the religious service. And, last but not least, another answer could connect the printing of the *Lives of the Saints* to its author's intention of giving the believers a beautiful book for reading, a book with a strong moralizing character.⁴¹

Having reached the Slavic territory between the ninth and the fourteenth centuries, the literature of Byzantium, or the model of the old Eastern cultures, which foregrounds certain literary genres (especially history in the secular domain and religious literary genres such as hymnography, hagiography, ecclesiastical eloquence, etc.) and consigns others (ancient tragedy)⁴² to oblivion, becomes a source of inspiration for the entire space of the Eastern culture, to which the earlier Romanian culture may also be subsumed. Seen from within, the latter can be placed in its natural framework, and its originality may be determined based on similar works from the other cultures of the eastern area.⁴³ For example, the *Lives of the Saints* devised by Dosoftei into four volumes must have represented, at that time, a genuine literary genre, called by Iorga the "novella and the novel of the Middle Ages,"⁴⁴ which was open to the imagination but also reflected the real daily life in which the saints were made to act, the type of reading offered thereby meeting, surely, the expectations of the reader of that time.

The "Teachings" of the *Lives of the Saints* do not stop here. They also include the contribution that this printed text brought to an interesting synthesis whereby, in the second half of the seventeenth century, the Romanian culture creatively assimilated (and had done so ever since the sixteenth century) the major Reformation trends manifest in the West. The Romanians did not become Lutherans or Calvinists when they came into contact with the Reformation; they did not escape from the Eastern confessional area, but the Romanian language became, for the first time in this area, a cultural vehicle with the prestige of a language of the "holy" books and service.⁴⁵ All in all, a gesture born from a need to reform the Eastern Church itself, which was preparing to cross the psychological border to the modern world.⁴⁶ As the main promoter of this internal revival, Dosoftei was extremely interested in the "practical manifestation of religiosity," in the "evangelization" of the population, assuming even "educational responsibilities" for achieving "social discipline"⁴⁷ not only in Moldavia, but also in Transylvania.

The history of the Orthodox Church in Transylvania in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries strongly reflected the “dynamism” and the “imperatives”⁴⁸ of an era marked by profound political and institutional transformations. The confessional life of this period of diversity and transformation was marked, in particular, by a Christianity of a “rural” type, “steeped in animism and fascinated by miracles,”⁴⁹ which tried to respect the ecclesiastical tradition and which abounded in devotional practices related not only to holidays and fasting, but also to the cult of the saints and of the dead. In cultural terms, while not accepted amongst the official churches but allowed to exist, the Eastern Church remained the most important “institution”⁵⁰ of the Romanians in Transylvania, untainted by any “heresy,”⁵¹ which helped the latter to maintain the consciousness of their Roman origins.

In Dosoftei’s time, the life of the Transylvanian Romanians and of their Church was particularly difficult. To the burden of poverty was added the pressure from the Diet that the Transylvanian Romanians relinquish their ancestral religious practice and adhere to the Reformation, not just in dogmatic, but also in liturgical and devotional terms, the aspects envisaged being, explicitly, the cult of the saints and of the dead. The ruling authorities in Transylvania encountered, however, a very strong resistance from the nation that was regarded, together with its confession in this territory, as merely “tolerated.” The “amazing” fact that the Romanians managed to withstand all threats and remain “steadfast”⁵² in their faith and ancestral customs was due primarily, as the specialist literature attests,⁵³ to the hierarchical links between the Romanian Church in Transylvania and the one in the Romanian Principalities. The unity of ecclesiastical life for all the Romanians was, therefore, of great help to the Romanians in Transylvania, since religion became for them synonymous with nationality,⁵⁴ and the disavowal of their religion might have been experienced as the loss of their national being. The patronage of the rulers and metropolitans of Wallachia and Moldavia, already manifesting itself in the sixteenth century, with the attention granted to Coresi’s printed texts, would also become significant for the “medieval Romanian solidarity”⁵⁵ of the next century. As Wallachia and Moldavia had positioned themselves as “traditional protectors”⁵⁶ of Transylvanian Orthodoxy (attentive to what was happening in Transylvania, Metropolitan Varlaam of Moldavia drew up, in 1644, a *Rebuttal to Calvinist Catechism*), Dosoftei also felt obliged to get involved in the battle for defending the ancestral religious practice of the Transylvanian Romanians, claiming to be firmly against the spreading of heresies in the Romanian Orthodox Church of Transylvania. Through the references inserted in the *Lives of the Saints*, he tried to draw attention to the new threat. However, the thought of the danger posed to the ancestral faith by the Protestant propaganda in Transylvania, keen on strengthening itself in terms of its “institutions and identity,”⁵⁷ must have become obsessive, since it would make Dosoftei return to the

subject in the abovementioned printed text, directly addressing, only a few pages later, the Protestant elders, which was unusual for this type of text. By printing the *Lives of the Saints*, Dosoftei appears to have thought that he could provide an invincible weapon against schisms and heresies, urging the Eastern Church to defend, redefine and internally consolidate itself.⁵⁸

With the Romanians' religion itself at stake, the Orthodox faith and practice in Transylvania were reviewed from the perspective of the Protestant norms, and religious books in the Romanian language came to be seen as a necessary instrument in the formation of a new type of believer. On a territory where missionary strategies employed by the Reformation and the Counter Reformation vied for supremacy, the Romanian culture tried to exploit the situation and took initiatives meant to promote writing in the Romanian language. The translation into Romanian of the main religious books of the altar and the pew contributed significantly not only to strengthening the unity of the Romanians, but also consolidated the idea of the unity of the Romanian language spoken in all the territories inhabited by Romanians, acutely stressing the need for a literary, cultivated language for the "Romanians everywhere."⁵⁹ Moreover, by surpassing the natural borders, the circulation of books also acquired a strong confessional, ideological and political connotation, contributing to the unity between the Romanians in Transylvania and those living south and east of the Carpathians, especially considering that the Romanians in Transylvania did not have the privilege of an officially accepted religious institution and could also not promote the "necessary cultural institutions."⁶⁰ If Varlaam's *Cazania* (Homiliary) of 1643, for example, was much appreciated within the cultural-religious milieu in Transylvania and it is known that three hundred and sixty printed copies and over fifty manuscripts discovered so far⁶¹ circulated in the Transylvanian area, we have no doubt that the printed text of Dosoftei's *Lives of the Saints*, which had been given to the churches and monasteries in Transylvania, must have enjoyed a good reception there. The action of the great Moldavian hierarch reveals an undeniable interest not only in improving the instruments of national cultural expression,⁶² but also in using them on a wider scale.

A semiotic perspective on culture⁶³ defines it as memory, the non-hereditary memory of a community, linked to the experience of the past. The *Lives of the Saints* is more than a pew book with a religious, historical and cultural function; it is more than a book of theological debates or a weapon in the struggle to defend ancestral religious practices. It is, ultimately, an important period document. Metropolitan Dosoftei seems to have felt the need to "reactualize" faith, bringing the old time of the saints' passions into what was the new law of Christ of Moldavia's historical present.

Intellectually, culturally and politically engaged, some of Dosoftei's "words" also have a strong political undertone, making obvious references to the social

problems of his century. The “Word” to John Chrysostom could be a good example in this sense, because the tone of reproach that is disseminated between the lines seems to “reactualize” the feeling of disgruntlement the Moldavian hierarch experienced in relation to the shortcomings of contemporary society.

A CHURCH BOOK or a book for reading, the printed *Lives of the Saints* acquires the significance of a cultural gesture indicating that Metropolitan Dosoftei’s scholarly activity was part of the greater effort towards the assertion of Romanian as a liturgical language, revealing its potentialities as a means of expression through a creative act. The appearance of the *Lives of the Saints* undoubtedly modified the Romanian cultural landscape of the late seventeenth century, influencing the future development of Romanian literature and contributing thus to its emergence, as an individually distinct phenomenon, in a space where the Byzantine influence prevailed. The *Lives of the Saints* is, ultimately, not only the manifestation of the efforts made by the Romanian spirituality towards finding its own means of expression, but also, given the manifold connotations with which the printed text is laden in the religious and political context of the time, an instrument of defending the “ancient” religious practices, of reinvigorating and strengthening the ancestral rite.⁶⁴

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Notes

1. Anton Dumitriu, *Alétheia* (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1984), 38.
2. Ibid.
3. Cf. Hippolyte Taine, *Pagini de critică*, selected, translated and with a preface by Silvan Iosifescu (Bucharest: Ed. pentru Literatură Universală, 1965), 250.
4. Alexandru Duțu, *Dimensiunea umană a istoriei* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1986), 8.
5. Cf. Ernst Cassirer, *Eseu despre om: O introducere în filozofia culturii umane*, trans. Constantin Cosman (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1994), 99.
6. Taine, 248.
7. See Dan Horia Mazilu, *Introducere în opera lui Dosoftei* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1997), 6–16, where the main opinions concerning Dosoftei’s ethnic origins are summed up and interpreted.
8. See Ștefan Ciobanu, *Dosoftei, mitropolitul Moldovei, și activitatea sa literară*, translated from Russian by Ștefan Berechet (Iași: n.p., 1918), 75.
9. See Ștefan Ciobanu, “Contribuțiuni privitoare la originea și moartea mitropolitului Moldovei Dosofteiu” (speech delivered on 28 May 1919 with a response by Ioan Bianu, Bucharest, 1920), 8–9.
10. Cf. Nicolae Cartoian, *Istoria literaturii române vechi*, afterword and final bibliographies by Dan Simonescu, preface by Dan Zamfirescu (Bucharest: Minerva, 1980), 202.

11. Al. Andriescu, "Studiu introductiv," in Dosoftei, *Opere*, vol. 1, *Versuri*, critical edition by N. A. Ursu (Bucharest: Minerva, 1978), XI–XII.
12. See Mazilu, 16.
13. *Ibid.*, 16–25.
14. Cf. Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, vol. 2 (the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries) (Bucharest: Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1994), 96.
15. See Mazilu, 19–56, for a highly documented analysis of the work of the Moldavian metropolitan bishop.
16. See *ibid.*, 24–33, for a debate on ascribing the translation of Herodotus' *Histories* to Dosoftei.
17. Cf. Păcurariu, 97.
18. See N. A. Ursu, "Dosoftei necunoscut," *Cronica* (Iași), no. 6 (523), 1976: 4.
19. See Mazilu, 44–56, where the question of Dosoftei's (possibly forced) exile is discussed.
20. Cf. N. A. Ursu, "Alte traduceri necunoscute din tinerețea lui Dosoftei," *Limba română* (Bucharest) 27, 5 (1978): 491.
21. Cf. Dan Simionescu, *Dosoftei traducător din dramaturgia cretană/Prologul lui Erofilii*, transcription and editor's note by Rodica Iovan. The modern version of the *Prologue* by Romulus Vulpescu, in *Manuscriptum* (Bucharest) 3, 3 (1972): 28–41.
22. Cf. Silviu Dragomir, "Contribuții privitoare la relațiile Bisericii românești cu Rusia în veacul XVII: Scrisoarea patriarhului Ioachim al Moscovei către Mitropolitul Dosofteu," *Analele Academiei Române* (Bucharest), 2nd ser., 34 (1911–1912), *Memoriile secțiunii istorice* (1912): 50–53.
23. See Mazilu, 49–62.
24. See Cartoian, 203.
25. Accompanied by a letter that evinces the esteem Dosoftei enjoyed among his contemporaries (Dragomir, 128).
26. Cf. Ion Gheție, ed., *Istoria limbii române literare: Epoca veche (1532–1780)* (Bucharest: Ed. Academiei Române, 1997), 285.
27. See Cassirer, 256.
28. Cf. Paul Evdochimov, *Arta icoanei: O teologie a frumuseții*, trans. Grigore Moga and Petru Moga (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1992), 111.
29. *Ibid.*
30. See Doru Radosav, *Carte și societate în nord-vestul Transilvaniei (sec. XVII–XIX)* (Oradea: Fundația Culturală Cele Trei Crișuri, 1995), 190.
31. See Ioan Bălan, *Limba cărților bisericești* (Blaj: Tip. Seminarului greco-catolic, 1914), 152: "Liturgical books demand that the pew should answer the priest's and the deacon's prayers. This Slavonic word means 'people.' Well, with us, the word 'pew' had completely lost its original meaning, for only the singers could answer and that is why the 'pew' referred to those who sang or the place whence they sang. Dosoftei returns us to the time from the beginning of the Christian churches; he has the priest and the people perform the holy liturgy together."
32. Onisifor Ghibu, *Limba noălor cărți bisericești* (Sibiu: Tip. Tipografiei Archidieceșane, 1905), 6.

33. Mazilu, 65.
34. See Juri Lotman and B. A. Ouspenski, *The Semiotics of Russian Cultural History* (London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 21.
35. The phrase “viața și petrecerea” represents the translation of an approximately synonymous Greek phrase, frequently encountered in the titles of texts containing the lives of saints. Cf. Liviu Onu, “Paternitatea titlului *Viața și petrecerea...* sau o chestiune de metodă,” *Limba română* 31, 3 (May–June 1982): 247–251.
36. In the scholarly centre of Studion, which was representative for Byzantine culture, the various short or long renditions of the hagiographies were systematised in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The fate of the shorter biographies (the summative *Synaxaria*) would evolve in direct connection with that of the *Menaia*, distributed according to the days of the year, and they would circulate either together with the hymns of the day, or separately. From early times, from the thirteenth century (or maybe even from the twelfth), the brief *Synaxaria* were translated (in various versions) into Slavonic, a language in which the foreword to the entire collection was written: “Prologue.” See Cătălina Velculescu, “Proloagele—o culegere de literatură bizantină și soarta ei în literatura română,” *Memoriile secției de filologie, literatură și arte* (Bucharest), 4, 10 (1988): 131–132.
37. Dosoftei, *Viața și petrecerea svinților* [Iași: Tiparnița Mitropoliei, 1682–1686], critical edition by Rodica Freñiu (Cluj-Napoca: Echinox, 2002), 14.
38. Cf. Gabriel Țepelea, *Studii de istorie și limbă literară* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1970), 80.
39. Cf. Cătălina Velculescu, *Cărți populare și cultură românească* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1984), 133.
40. See Cartoian, 209; Velculescu, *Cărți populare*, 78; Păcurariu, 103; Mazilu, 175–177.
41. It is unanimously acknowledged that in the medieval system, the moral or tropological level is very high. For instance, reading the Bible takes one ads beyond the narrative, to the restructuring and reorientation of one’s existence, accompanied by the subsidiary message of the model or the example to be followed: “The clearest examples of this kind of meaning are probably the parables of Jesus, explicitly fictions, but fictions that end with ‘Go, and do thou likewise’” (Northop Frye, *Dubla viziune: Limbaj și semnificație în religie*, translated, foreword and notes by Ioana Stanciu and Aurel Sasu (Bucharest: Ed. Fundației Culturale Române, 1993), 112).
42. See Dan Zamfirescu, *Studii și articole de literatură română veche* (Bucharest: Ed. pentru Literatură, 1967), 23.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Apud ibid.*, 21.
45. See *ibid.*, 24–25.
46. See Ana Dumitran, *Religie ortodoxă—religie reformată: Ipostaze ale identității confesionale a românilor din Transilvania în secolele XVI–XVII*, with a preface by Paul Cernovodeanu, honorary member of the Romanian Academy (Cluj-Napoca: Nereamia Napocae, 2004), 200.
47. *Ibid.*, 196.
48. Ovidiu Ghitta, “Biserica Ortodoxă din Transilvania (Secolul al XVI-lea—a doua jumătate a secolului al XVII-lea),” in *Istoria Transilvaniei*, vol. 2 (*de la 1541 până la 1711*),

- eds. Ioan-Aurel Pop, Thomas Năgler, and Magyari András (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2007), 263.
49. Ibid., 265.
 50. Ioan-Aurel Pop, “Cultura românilor în a doua jumătate a secolului al XVI-lea,” in *Istoria Transilvaniei*, 2: 288.
 51. See *ibid.*, 295.
 52. Ioan Lupaș, *Istoria bisericească a românilor ardeleni*, 2nd edition, introduction, edition, notes and commentaries by Doru Radosav (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1995), 95.
 53. See *ibid.*
 54. Cf. Constantin Voicu, *Biserica strămoșească din Transilvania în lupta pentru unitatea spirituală și națională a poporului român* (Sibiu: n.p., 1989), 46.
 55. Pop, 292.
 56. Ghitta, 273.
 57. *Ibid.*, 272.
 58. See Dumitran, 203.
 59. Doru Radosav, “Cultura românească din Transilvania în secolul al XVII-lea,” in *Istoria Transilvaniei*, 2: 317.
 60. Pop, 293.
 61. Cf. Radosav, “Cultura românească din Transilvania în secolul al XVII-lea,” 317.
 62. Cf. Gheție, 269.
 63. See Iuri Lotman, *Studii de tipologie a culturii*, trans. Radu Nicolau (Bucharest: Univers, 1974), 15.
 64. See Mazilu, 57.

Abstract

Dosoftei, the *Lives of the Saints*, and the Defense of Ancestral Religious Practices in Transylvania

Starting from the premise that a hermeneutic and cultural-semiotic approach entails a “cultural dialogue” and that it catalyses memory into a “creative and reconstructive process,” this study considers both the religious significance of Metropolitan Dosoftei’s *Viața și petrecerea sfinților* (*Lives of the saints*) (1682–1684), and the functions whereby this particular cultural Romanian text gains individuality. Whether regarded as a church book or a book for reading, the printed text entitled *Lives of the Saints* acquires the significance of a cultural gesture that evinces not only the effort undertaken towards allowing Romanian spirituality to find its own means of expression, but also the endeavor to turn it into an instrument defending ancestral practices, replenishing and consolidating the ancestral worship. Opening generous and diverse avenues of study, the *Lives of the Saints* lends itself very well to a theological analysis, and its printed text may become a valuable document for historical research (more specifically, for the history of mentalities) on the issue of Moldavian and Transylvanian denominations during the late seventeenth century.

Keywords

Orthodox confession, cult of the saints, historical-cultural function